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COMMENDABLES

The overall Zone 1 Quality Review Team had excellent cooperation of all field office and technical service office staff members, along with great weather for the end of January. Each field staff reviewed was prepared, candid, and honest in the answering of questions and actively participated in the review process. This was greatly appreciated and expedited the review process.

The ASTC (FO) and Team Coordinators are commended for the excellent leadership in providing guidance and information to team members. It was obvious from reviewing management issues, and in discussions concerning management policies and procedures, that extra effort was made to improve understanding within the teams.

The review team observed implementation and use of Conservation Technical Assistance, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Reserve Program, and the State Cost-Share Program in addressing the conservation needs of the natural resources and our clients. The administration and management of such a diversity of programs in a given office presents challenges in managing the planning, implementation, and contractual processes that often vary between programs. The field personnel are to be commended for pursuing and using a variety of available NRCS programs in meeting the conservation needs of the natural resources and clients they serve.

II. A. (1) (d) Planning and Workload Assessment**Development of Conservation Needs Assessments and Action Plans:**

One field office has developed a framework for a resource inventory for the Ponca Tribe. The framework is a good start in developing a comprehensive inventory of natural resource issues for the Ponca Tribe. In addition, the field office has expanded the conservation needs assessment to include additional resource information data and visual identification of resource issues. This is excellent material that should be shared with the Zone.

II. A. 3. Plan of Operations:

The joint plan of operations developed by one conservation district and field office is a well-developed partnership plan. The plan is an active document that is reviewed by the partnership to guide priority actions and is revised to meet current and changing needs. The use of these documents helps maintain accountability among the partnership as they deliver a diverse and complex program. The partnership is commended for the development and use of this document.

II. B. 5 Follow-up:

One field office has developed a comprehensive follow up system that includes; registers for: clients sign in, conservation planning requests, individual Farm Bill Program applications and contracts. The staff utilizes these registers to schedule priority work and to ensure timely services are provided. For this, they are commended, and it is recommended the system be shared with other field offices.

II. C. (1) (c) Progress Reporting:

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Field Offices are to be commended for systematically reporting of performance measurement items in FY 2003. PRMS data indicated that significant performance reporting had been accomplished in the first quarter of FY 2003.

II. C. (2) Quality Reviews:

Conservation plans reviewed reflected successful implementation of a majority of the action items presented in the past two zone reviews. Cultural resource evaluations, and utility forms were properly prepared and filed in most plans reviewed, engineering job approval authorities were current, surveying instruments were being checked, fire extinguishers and bio hazard equipment were present in all vehicles.

II.C. (2) (c) Quality Reviews:

In Fiscal Year 2002, Technical and Programs staffs at the Zone level are to be commended for implementing "practice" and "program" reviews as required by policy currently contained in Oklahoma State Bulletin OK340-2-3. These staff not only met the requirements of the policy, but also identified changes needed within the policy and provided training on items needing attention.

III. A. (2) (e) Implementation of Conservation Plans:

Practices contained in plans field reviewed were the appropriate practice for the installed site location. No practices were found that were a misuse of the practice or an improper practice code. This is commendable.

III. A. (2) Implementation of Conservation Plans:

The Level 3 Certified Conservation Planners in the Zone did a good job finishing up Level 2 Conservation Planning Certifications by the state imposed deadlines. Work continues to "maintain" certifications for the future.

IV. A.(1) Field Office Technical Guide

Field Office Technical Guides (FOTG) in all offices reviewed were current and up to date in all respects. Field Office and TSO staffs are commended for this effort and encouraged to keep them current as we move to an electronic FOTG.

IV. F Geographic Information Systems

Field Offices are commended for their use of GIS (ArcView) in the conservation planning process. This is a new and difficult tool to use, but with experience and repetitious use, it will become a tool that will greatly enhance the quality of conservation plans. The Resource Soil Scientist is also commended for his assistance to the field with ArcView.

VI. Information:

Field Offices are commended for developing a strong information program to market available services and to inform the public concerning Farm Bill Programs. Public locally led meetings, educational seminars, newspaper articles, posters, and radio spot announcements were being used to inform the public. Community meetings and events were being utilized to gather resource concerns and deliver Farm Bill information.

Personnel in the Zone developed a method of reaching the Hispanic community by working with local translators to develop news releases in Spanish. This effort has greatly enhanced the communication between NRCS and the Hispanic Community. For this the Zone is commended.

VI. 3. Relations with groups:

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During the quality review, the review team identified strong partnership efforts working together to meet resource issues. The partnership effort at two offices was particularly commendable. The conservation district, district employees, and NRCS personnel worked closely to prioritize work assignments and deliver assistance. It was obvious in these two offices that the partnership was a true partnership effort, in which each entity accepted their responsibilities.

VI. 4. Environmental Education:

Conservation education was identified as a strong component of informing the public, particularly in two field offices. The staffs are commended for their partnership efforts in delivering conservation education in multiple media's.

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ACTION ITEMS**II. A. (1) (d) Planning and Workload Assessment****Development of Conservation Needs Assessments and Action Plans**

Finding: Each of the four offices reviewed had completed the basic conservation needs assessment, and had provided additional assessment inventories to support EQIP and other conservation priorities. Two field offices have been developing visual maps that identify resource issues. The basic conservation needs assessments will serve as the foundation for future development of resource data and visual identification of resource issues. However, further development of resource concerns, severity classification, and quantification are needed to build an accurate picture of the conservation needs. As an example, soil erosion was identified on just over 50,000 acres. There was no description of the land type, severity, location, or extent of the problem. Soil erosion was probably present on all cropland soils in the county, but it could not be discerned whether this was a cropland, grazingland, or roadside erosion concern. Nor could you determine if it was wind erosion, sheet and rill, ephemeral, or gully erosion. If sheet and rill, was it on land less than T, T-2T, or greater than T? This similar need could be carried across the needs assessment for all other issues, including but not limited to, brush species and degree of infestation, grazingland and classification of use, or similarity indexes, or introduced pasture types and degree of management.

Action Item 1: District Conservationists will continue to update conservation needs assessments based on concerns identified during the locally led process or observed through field work. In addition, resource quantification and development of visual identification needs to be strengthened in each needs assessment. Each natural concern expressed through the locally-led process, will be documented in the conservation needs assessment and the process of describing the resource condition will be initiated.

Required Action Date: September 30, 2003

Certification: ASTC (FO)

Finding: Resource Inventories had not been completed for all Tribes by the Tribal liaisons. One field office had initiated a base inventory that identified tracts of Ponca tribal lands, but an inventory of needs had not been completed to assist the tribe in developing priorities.

Action Item 2: Tribal liaisons will meet with tribes immediately to ascertain their interest in developing resource inventories. The liaisons will work with BIA and/or tribal government to identify resource concerns and develop a comprehensive inventory of resource information.

Required Action Date: September 30, 2003

Certification: ASTC (FO)

II. A. (2) Priority Determination

Finding: A review of numerous documents indicated a lack of consistency in priority setting among conservation partners. It was recognized that documents reviewed were developed at different times and for different purposes. However, the conservation partners need to agree on

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the priorities within a given conservation district. Conservation Programs Manual 500.04 provides guidance in development of a conservation action plan. This plan, built from resource issues identified and quantified in the conservation needs assessment, forms the target that all conservation programs and technical assistance activities should be directed toward. Multiple plans or priorities may flow from this action plan dependent upon program authorities, but all activities should be directed at solving the key resource issues identified in the needs assessment. An example of the problem was, use of the state cost-share program funding for conservation practices that were not relevant to locally established conservation priorities.

Action Item 3: District Conservationists will review priority conservation decisions that form the conservation action plan at the same time the Mutual Agreement and Cooperative Working Agreements are reviewed with conservation districts. Priorities for Farm Bill Programs, district's Long-Range Plans, and State Cost-Share will be reviewed and agreements reached on priorities that are in agreement with the conservation needs assessment and the conservation action plan.

Required Action Date: September 30, 2003

Certification: ASTC (FO)

II.A. (3)(a) Plan of Operations

Finding: NRCS currently has an agreement with the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and conservation districts to develop joint annual plans. Joint plans are to reflect partnership priorities in meeting resource needs. A review of joint plans in each office revealed that critical priorities were being addressed. However, the quality of some of the joint plans could use improvement.

Action Item 4: ASTC (FO) will conduct training sessions on the development of joint plans to the partnership, prior to the development of new joint plans of operations. The Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be invited to assist in this training effort. District Conservationists will work with conservation districts to build joint annual plans utilizing a current conservation needs assessment, locally led conservation, and program implementation priorities that reflect critical resource priorities.

Required Action Date: June 30, 2003.

Certification: ASTC (FO)

II. B. (1) (b) Employee Development

Finding: Teams had not developed formalized Team Training Action Plans as required by the Zone 2 review. It was noted that Team Coordinators were meeting quarterly with technical specialists and reviewing training needs. Technical specialists and others were providing excellent training opportunities to team members and, as a result, technology transfer was being accomplished. Because of the workload demands and individual training needs of new employees versus experienced employees, it is imperative that the Teams meet with technical specialists and develop a comprehensive training action plan which includes type of training, dates for training, and team members needing the training.

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Action Item 5: Each Field Team, in collaboration with Technical Service Office Specialists and the ASTC (FO), will review this Quality Assessment Report, the Zone 2 Quality Review Report, Practice and Program Review Reports conducted in the Team area, Employee Development Plans, and conservation planning documentation requirements in an official team meeting. After reviewing these documents, each field team will develop an action plan to address training and guidance needs to assure quality compliance.

Required Action Date: May 31, 2003

Certification: ASTC (FO)

Action Item 6: Needs identified in the Team's Guidance/Training Action Plan will be concurred in by the State Leadership Team. Technical Specialists and Team Coordinators will then develop a schedule to implement the Action Plan.

Required Action Date: June 30, 2003

Certification: ASTC (FO)

Finding: Each NRCS employee was required to enter skill information into the SIMS database through ICAMS. A review of employees files indicated that several employees had either not completed this task or the supervisor had not certified the skill information for employees they supervise.

Action Item 7: The State Leadership Team will provide guidance on the minimum skills information that will be required. After receiving guidance, each supervisor will review each employee's skill history through ICAMS to ensure the required information has been entered and certified. Supervisors will routinely review employee's skills data to ensure that employee's profiles are current.

Required Action Date: June 30, 2003

Certification: ASTC (FO), SLT

II.B (2) Scheduling

Finding: General Manual Section 330 Part OK404.3 (b)(1)(iv)(2) requires NRCS field employees to maintain a weekly schedule that includes duty hours, full week's work, and full day's work for each employee, what is to be done, who it is to be done with, and confirmed time and dates. GM Section 330 Part OK 404.3 (c) further requires time and attendance records are supported by a document that contains hours of work/leave and actual work performed. Documents reviewed in each field office were found to be lacking in meeting one or both of these policy requirements. Schedules lacked full day's work, definite appointments, etc., while supporting payroll documents lacked hours worked and actual work performed.

Action Item 8: ASTC (FO) will conduct a training session on the requirements for weekly schedules and supporting documentation for Time and Attendance reports contained in General Manual Section 330 Parts OK404.3 (b)(1)(iv)(2) and OK404.3 (c) at an official Team and/or Zone meeting.

Required Action Date: May 31, 2003

Certification: ASTC (FO)

Finding: A review of records in three of the four offices revealed a system was not in place to track long term requests, or ensure requests made by clients were fulfilled.

Action Item 9: District Conservationists will develop a tracking system to ensure long term scheduling needs are identified and those clients' requests are met.

Required Action Date: May 31, 2003

Certification: ASTC (FO)

II. C. 1. Quality Reviews

Finding: Several offices in the Zone are providing significant amount of technical assistance on state school land. Questions were raised during the review as to the need to capture time charges in assisting school land producers.

Action Item 10: The state leadership team will provide guidance on the need to capture time spent servicing state school land issues in WebTCAS.

Required Action Date: March 31, 2003

Certification: SLT

II. C. 2. Quality Reviews

Finding: Practice review registers certified by District Conservationists for 2002 did not contain all practices certified by field office employees for the fiscal year. It was apparent that several practices, including management practices, were not reported by the District Conservationists on OK- MGT-WKSHT – 1, used to record all practices certified by the field office.

In addition, concerns were raised over the procedure in place to clear pending items. Current policy requires documentation to clear pending items be sent to the ASTC (FO). The policy needs to be revised to require copies of the documentation to remove items from pending to also be sent to the appropriate technical service office specialist. The change in policy will expedite quality improvement through more timely servicing.

Action Item 11: ASTC (FO) will provide guidance in a zone and/or team meeting(s) concerning the proper documentation requirements for all practices certified within a field office. District conservationists will ensure that all field employees are recording each practice certified.

Required Action Date: June 30, 2003

Certification: ASTC (FO)

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Action Item 12: State Leadership Team will revise the practice review (spot check) policy to include guidance for district conservationists to send copies of documents supporting progress on pending items to the appropriate technical office specialist.

Required Action Date: March 31, 2003

Certification: BOT

III. A. (2) (c) Implementation of Conservation Plans

Finding: Payments are being made for practices that have not been certified as to meeting NRCS standards. This was found on pipelines, irrigation water management, irrigation system conversions, trickle irrigation, pest management, and grass planting. Most probable reason for this is because there are no field sheets for many of these practices. Some offices are handling this by making their own sheets and statements, while other offices are just making payments without supporting documentation.

Action Item 13: Field offices will review General Manual 450, Part 407, Subpart B – Documentation and Certification. No payments for practices will be processed unless they have been certified to meeting NRCS specifications utilizing the supporting documentation requirements found in General Manual 450.

Required Action Date: Immediately

Certification: District Conservationists

III. A. (2) (d) Implementation of Conservation Plans

Finding: Conservation plans contain watering facilities for livestock. However, no supporting documentation was found as to how the number of head utilizing the tank was technically determined. Without this information, it could not be determined if the tank was either too large or too small to meet herd demand. Agreement could not be reached in the field as to what the appropriate method to be used to determine the number of head utilizing a tank.

Action Item 14: A forage inventory, which reveals the total anticipated carrying capacity, coupled with a grazing plan, which would reveal the number of head utilizing a watering facility at any given time, will provide the basis for sizing of a watering facility.

Technical Service Office Specialists (Resource Engineers/Resource Specialist) will work with the ECS Staff/State Engineering Staff to provide a training session in each zone for designing watering facilities; both storage and drinking facilities. This training will include extracting from the grazing plan and forage inventory, the number of head and the time period that water is to be made available.

Required Action Date: September 30, 2003

Certification: TSO Specialists, ECS Staff, State Engineering Staff

III. A. (2) (d) Implementation of Conservation Plans

Finding: Structural practices are being certified for payment without proper vegetation being established or information on vegetation being provided to the landowner. Any structural practice requiring vegetation to function properly or to provide protection does not meet NRCS standards until the vegetation is established. For landowner's convenience, NRCS can certify earthwork for payment purposes, but notes should be made on the field sheet that the practice is complete, except for vegetation. No follow-up is being provided to ensure the landowner is aware of the need for vegetation, or if vegetation is ever established for structural practices.

Action Item 15: Technical service office specialists will provide training on the proper use of the CPA-4 for structural practices. This is to include a cross-section of the practice identifying areas needing vegetation, and if temporary cover is needed if the practice is completed outside the planting dates.

Required Action Date: July 31, 2003

Certification: Technical Service Office Specialists

Action Item 16: Field office staff will provide a CPA-4 to the landowner when a structural practice requiring vegetation is certified for payment on earthwork. If a practice has earthwork certified for payment, the field notes should reflect that vegetation has not been established on the date of certification.

Required Action Date: Immediately

Certification: District Conservationists

III.A. (2) (d) Implementation of Conservation Plans

Findings: Practices involving vegetation established (342, 550, 512) appear to be certified to meet standard and specifications and paid for (when cost share is involved), even though soils tests and receipts for fertilizer applied were not present. In some cases, the field office staff waited one year to assure establishment (then explained the fertility was for maintenance).

Action Item 17: The State Resource Conservationist will work with the Ecological Sciences and Conservation Planning Staff to review policy, make appropriate changes, and issue guidance (bulletin or policy in the General Manual) to the field.

Required Action Date: April 30, 2003

Certification: State Resource Conservationist

III. A. (2) (d) Implementation of Conservation Plans

Finding: The soils information in conservation plans is current and accurate. However, there is inconsistency in the use of non-technical descriptions in conservation plans. Some offices use only the SOIL non-tech description, some use SOIL, RANGE, and HEL non-tech descriptions, or other combination of these.

Action Item 18: The State Soil Scientist and State Resource Conservationist will provide guidance on the use of NON-TECH description in supporting the soils map in conservation plans.

Required Action Date: April 30, 2003

Certification: State Soil Scientist / State Resource Conservationist

Action Item 19: The Resource Soil Scientist will provide training on the use of NON-TECH descriptions to the field at team meetings after guidance is issued.

Required Action Date: September 30, 2003

Certification: Resource Soil Scientist

III. C. 2. (a) Watershed Operations

Finding: Sponsors are actively pursuing land rights on Lost Creek Channel. Questions were raised during the review regarding whether NRCS would provide financial assistance on channel construction.

Action Item 20: Bill Porter, ASTC (Environmental Resources), will review the Lost Creek Channel project and provide guidance to sponsors concerning NRCS's stance on channel construction projects.

Required Action Date: March 31, 2003

Certification: ASTC (Environmental Resources)

III. C. 2. (a) Watershed Operations

Finding: An EWP project was funded on Corps of Engineer controlled land. Questions were raised on rules concerning the authority for NRCS to provide EWP funding on Corps land.

Action Item 21: The state EWP program manager will review policy on providing EWP funding on Corps of Engineer controlled land and provide clarification.

Required Action Date: March 31, 2003

Certification: State Conservation Engineer

IV. C. (3) Environmental and Natural Resources

Finding: Offices are including documentation of environmental effects in the conservation plan. However, a number of variations of the CPA-52 form are being used. For the most part, only the last page of the CPA-52 is being completed for NEPA. It was also found that the Prime Farmland "Present" was often checked wrong and that there is some confusion on what is needed for Floodplain Management.

Action Item 22: The BOT will work with Steve Elsener (NEPA contact) to develop a simplified environmental form with instructions.

Required Action Date: June 30, 2003

Certification: BOT

Action Item 23: The TSO Staff will provide training to the field on completing the simplified environmental effects (i.e. Prime Farmland, Wetlands, Floodplain Management, etc.) form.

Required Action Date: September 30, 2003

Certification: Resource Soil Scientist / Resource Specialist

V. A. 7. Standard of Performance

Finding: Performance plans for employees were reviewed for FY 02 and 03. One employee had not received a final performance rating by the October 31, 2002, deadline and at least two employees did not have an electronically developed performance plan for FY 03.

Action Item 24: Human Resources will run a report to identify employees who have not had a final performance plan rating for FY 02 and employees who have not had an electronically developed FY 03 performance plan. This list will be provided to State Leadership Team supervisors for immediate resolution. Beginning immediately, supervisors will complete performance plan development, review, and final ratings electronically.

Required Action Date: April 1, 2003.

Certification: ASTC (FO)

V. A. 8. Position Descriptions

Finding: Current position descriptions were not available for several employees in the offices reviewed. New employees, as well as employees with several years of experience at the same location, did not have current position descriptions or the descriptions did not contain appropriate descriptions.

Action Item 25: Supervisors will review each employee's current position description to ensure each employee has a position description, and that the description contains an accurate description of work requirements for that position. Supervisors will identify employees who do not have a current position description, or need revisions, and notify the state level supervisor. Pen and ink revisions will be drafted by the first line supervisor for the review and concurrence of the state level supervisor.

Required Action Date: June 30, 2003.

Certification: ASTC (FO)

V (C.)(1) Timekeeping

Finding: National timekeeping codes were revised and implemented with the beginning of FY 2003. Bulletin OK 330-2-7 notified all employees in Oklahoma that codes and definitions had been revised. A review of time and attendance documents for PP# 21 (2002) in field offices revealed that field employees had developed a basic understanding of the new time codes. However, time charge errors were found in each field office. In addition, CTA – Grazing land was not being utilized by field staff when working on non Farm Bill program grazing land planning and application.

Action Item 26: ASTC (FO) and supervisors will review time and attendance codes in team and/or zone meetings and provide guidance to improve the accuracy of time charges by all employees.

Required Action Date: Immediately.

Certification: ASTC (FO)

**V (D.)(7) Physical and Safety
Vehicles**

Finding: A check of all vehicles at the field offices reviewed, revealed that most vehicles are being operated and maintained according to policy. However, one vehicle checked did not contain minimum items, such as: a front tag, accident kit, bio-security supplies, etc. Our policy requires that if a vehicle is in use by our agency it must be safe to operate, and stocked with certain items and supplies.

Action Item 27: District conservationists with vehicles missing minimum required items, will have those items replaced. The minimum required items are as follows: accident kit, front and rear license plates, first aid kit, fire extinguisher, and bio-security supplies.

Required Action Date: Immediately

Certification: ASTC (FO)

**VII (A.)(2) Relations
Other agencies and Units of Government**

Finding: All offices reviewed provided evidence of a broad cooperative working relationship with other local, state, and federal agencies and Tribes in addressing the conservation needs of the local people. A key aspect in prioritizing and delivering conservation assistance is the USDA local workgroup. All offices could provide recent evidence of local workgroup meetings through agendas, minutes, sign-in sheets, and sample mailings. However, these meetings were not very well attended as a whole, and in most instances there was no documentation as to the list of invited participants. Although, the NRCS and conservation district cannot be held

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responsible for individuals failing to attend the meeting, we should retain adequate documentation to ensure that timely notification was given to the local workgroup members to attend.

Action Item 28: Conservation Programs Manual (CPM) 501.00 – 501.03 contains an excellent description of a policy for the local workgroup. CPM 501.02(d) specifically addresses the government representatives to be invited to local workgroup meetings. Each district conservationists will develop and maintain a mailing list encompassing the local representatives as identified by policy. This mailing list may be stored in Customer Service Toolkit, Excel, or Word for use in mailings. A hard copy record will be maintained and updated in the NRCS case file containing all the local workgroup information. Each district conservationist will review and discuss the local workgroup roles, membership, and the mailing list with their conservation district board(s).

Required Action Date: June 30, 2003

Certification: ASTC (FO)

VIII. (1.) Cost-Sharing Conservation Programs

Understanding of Program purposes, objectives, policies, regulations and procedures.

Finding: The review of conservation program applications and contracts noted inadequacies and inconsistencies in program implementation, conservation planning, contract development and implementation. A few examples of items noted were the absence of a record of servicing or status for applications on-hand by program on the (NRCS-LTP-003); contracts not assembled in conformance with policy; lack of signed contractual documents; contract support documents without notations of completed practices, plans not implemented on schedule with no action; no data or records supporting the evaluation or ranking of the application; and no supporting data for certification of practices completed.

Action Item 29: The ASTC for Programs will work with the ASTC's (FO) and the ASTC for Environmental Resources to refine and continue a statewide quality assurance effort for programmatic issues. Further, a training package will be developed for contract administration training of field offices by May 30, 2003. The program quality reviews will be initiated in June and completed in all field offices by September 30, 2003. The district conservationists will correct all identified action items found within 90 days of the quality review. Program administration training will be initiated in June and completed by December 30, 2003.

Required Action Date: Quarterly and to be completed by September 30, 2002

Certification: ASTC (P)

VIII. (1.) Cost-Sharing Conservation Programs

Servicing of Applications

Finding: Most offices reported a significant number of applications being received for one or more of the conservation cost-share programs available in the field office. These applications were being properly recorded on the LTP-003 by program and fiscal year of receipt. However,

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in several situations there was no scheduling or servicing plan in place to ensure timely servicing of the application for program eligibility and environmental evaluation. It is recognized that much of the program information remains fluid and offices are reluctant to make commitments to applicants or finalize work that may need to be re-done. This is an acceptable action in terms of managing the steps in application processing. However, it is imperative the field offices schedule and take immediate action to begin/complete field work in the processing of applications and conservation plans, based upon the receipt of the application and locally defined priorities.

Action Item 30: District conservationists will evaluate current application numbers on-hand and project workload over the next two months accounting for additional applications. They will work with their staff in scheduling the field visits and basic resource data collection for application evaluation and conservation planning. Weekly schedules will be prepared, scheduling servicing for the week in advance. Offices are not required to fill the entire week with appointments, but must show sufficient forward scheduling to allow for servicing of the application and opportunity to work with the applicant in the field regarding their conservation needs.

Required Action Date: Immediately.

Certification: ASTC (FO)

VIII. (2.) Conservation Cost-Sharing Programs **Program activities in plan of operations**

Finding: Many of the contracts reviewed for WHIP and EQIP contained a conservation plan of operations, limited only to the practices and management items to be implemented through the cost-share contract. In fact, the plans were very limited in their scope and level of problem identification and resulting planned treatment of the natural resources within the area covered by the case file. Specifically, we found several water storage facilities planned and implemented through cost-share agreements with no inventories of the grazing resources or planning regarding grazing or haying of these lands. A minimal prescribed grazing narrative was found in most of the plans, but not much else. WHIP contracts uniformly lacked wildlife habitat management plans, identification of target species, or appraisals of the habitat. Habitat management narratives were minimal. Overall, there was some progress made on each contract reviewed in meeting the objectives for the program funding. However, NRCS fell short in delivering participants a fully developed conservation plan or identifying other opportunities to achieve conservation benefits.

Action Item 31: The Zone 1 technical staff will conduct conservation planning skills analysis within all field offices within the zone. The focus of this analysis will be to determine natural resource planning areas of risk where training is needed in order to provide proper problem identification and RMS level planning to all customers. It is the observation of the team that operation and maintenance, grazing lands, and wildlife habitat planning are of specific concern. The TSO will lead the training effort by prioritizing, coordinating, and conducting the training as described in Action Item 5. District conservationists will fully develop conservation plans in accordance with the NPPH for all the land covered by the contractual agreement. Conservation planning will encompass the broader resource issues for which the cost-share program is authorized.

Required Action Date: June 30, 2003

Certification: ASTC(FO)

X. Civil Rights:

4. Civil Rights Appraisals:

Findings: A review of past civil rights appraisals revealed that some action items have not been completed, and a lack of correspondence between the field office and the ASTC (FO) on the status of the review.

Action Item 32: All past civil rights appraisals will be followed up on to insure that all action items are completed by due dates, and properly documented to show the status of each action item.

Required Action Date: April 30, 2003

Certification: ASTC (FO)

16. Access to Facilities:

Findings: A review of all field offices' facilities revealed that some water fountains were higher than the maximum height regulations to be utilized by persons with disabilities, and there were no dispensers with cups available. It was also noted that one restroom marked for the disabled was cluttered with office furniture, boxes under the sink, and other equipment, making it impossible for the disabled to maneuver inside the restroom.

Action Item 33: The district conservationist will work with the other agencies in the building and the building owner to correct restroom and water fountain inadequacies.

Required Action Date: May 31, 2003

Certification: ASTC (FO)

Recommendations

II. C. 1. Progress Reporting

Finding: A review of PRMS reports for FY 03 found most offices were not reporting progress for progressive planning, conservation systems applied to address flooding concerns, and/or conservation systems applied to address water supply concerns. It was recognized these were relatively new progress items and better guidance in reporting these items is needed.

Recommendation: ASTC (FO) should provide training on the proper reporting of progress items; progressive planning, conservation systems applied to address flooding concerns, and conservation systems applied to address water supply concerns.

II. B. (1) Employee Development

Finding: Guidance has not been provided to field office concerning the new employee development plan templates that have been placed on the Oklahoma home page.

Recommendation: The State Administrative Officer will develop a bulletin to provide instruction on the location and use of the employee development templates now located on the administrative services and engineering home pages.

Finding: During the review, questions were raised concerning whether Nutrient management CEU's would be tracked through ICAMS.

Recommendation: State Resource Conservationist will provide guidance on tracking of nutrient management CEU's.

III. A. (2) (c) Implementation of Conservation Plans

Observation: One of the items noted during previous reviews, but not presented in reports, concerns the lack of protection provided to embankments. It has been noted, when livestock are present in the same field as an embankment, vegetation has a harder time getting established and livestock trails impact the integrity of the structure. In severe cases, livestock traffic alone can cause the embankment to fail before its anticipated design life.

Recommendation: NRCS has a responsibility to design structures that can survive to a reasonable life expectancy. If cost-share is provided, the producer has a legal obligation to maintain the practice to a certain design life. NRCS must provide practices and facilitating practices necessary for embankments to meet their life expectancy. It is recommended that all embankments located in fields with livestock access have, at minimum, a perimeter fence established around the embankment to control access to the embankment. Additional benefits of water quality could also be realized from fencing the entire impoundment area.

III. A. (2) (d) Implementation of Conservation Plans

Finding: During the practice reviews conducted statewide, TSO Resource Specialists identified significant problems with a complete understanding of the Nutrient Management and

Pest Management Standards and Specifications and the proper completion of the OK-CPA-4 and OK-CPA-16 form. The situation was equally evident in this review.

Recommendation: The Ecological Sciences and Conservation Planning Staff in Stillwater will work with the TSO Resource Specialists to provide thorough training on these two standards in each team throughout the state during the fiscal year.

III. A. (2) (d) Implementation of Conservation Plans

Finding: Several conservation plans reviewed met the minimal requirements of the National Planning Procedures Handbook but still struggle in the area of "clarity" of information and "quality" of conservation plan maps, etc. "Loose" and/or outdated materials in the case file was often present.

In a time where NRCS's role in conservation planning is being analyzed by several entities, we must strive to make the plans we develop with our clients more professional looking and understandable to the client.

Recommendation: Field staffs must continue to improve in this area of planning and view their work from the producer's viewpoint. Can he/she understand what, how, and where a practice is to be applied and how it will be maintained? We should also ask ourselves "Is it presented in a professional looking document?".

V.B. (2) Office Space

Finding: Several office entrances were not properly identified with Natural Resources Conservation Service Signage.

Recommendation: The office assistant should work with each office manager to identify office entrances which do not have proper NRCS signage and request signage through Ed Kephart, State Administrative Officer.

V.D. Safety (Biosecurity)

Finding: Although most office staffs were familiar with biosecurity issues and responsibilities, few employees seem to have a current, consistent knowledge of state NRCS Policy on this issue. Our continued ability to provide technical assistance and move farm to farm is contingent on producers maintaining confidence that our employees will routinely practice biosecurity.

Recommendation: All offices in the Zone should find the GM policy on this issue and review it at a staff meeting at least twice per year. They must follow the guidance contained within. A state bulletin, OK130-3-1, AGN - Reminder of Bio-Security Measures, dated 2-11-03, has been issued.

VIII (5.) (a.)Cost-Sharing Conservation Programs Status of Contracts

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Finding: Roughly 33% of the total EQIP contracted conservation work has been installed. Figures for the WHIP are similar. This backlog of conservation work compared to the increased funding and future contracted conservation activity is tremendous. Most field offices lack a formalized process for recording anticipated technical assistance and active follow-up contact with producers to promote timely implementation of conservation plans. It is anticipated that the ProTracs contracting tool will provide this functionality, but delivery of the tool will likely fall beyond this year's practice application season.

Recommendation: District conservationists make an assessment of their conservation contract practice implementation backlog and current year's scheduled practice(s). Initiate direct contact with program participants to ensure they are aware of the practices to be completed, the technical standards associated with the practice(s), and the availability of quality, timely, comprehensive technical assistance from their local field office.

IX. 7. Records Management

Finding: Field Office personnel asked for clarification on proper filing guidance for locally led conservation, civil rights, outreach, and farm bill publicity.

Recommendation: State leadership team will provide guidance on the proper filing of locally led conservation, civil rights outreach, and farm bill publicity.

X. Civil Rights

5. (B.) Public Notification

Finding: A review of published news articles revealed that the nondiscrimination statement was not published in most articles. The district conservationists stated the articles were presented for publication with the nondiscrimination statement, but the original articles was not on file.

Recommendation: In the future, the original article should be filed for verification of the nondiscrimination statement.

9. Census Data Disparities:

Findings: Census data in the civil rights files showed there were customers that did not receive service or any assistance from the NRCS. The district conservationists stated they did not know who these individuals were, and they had inquired to different sources to identify these individuals. However, there was no documentation in the files to indicate their efforts.

Recommendation: It is recommended that district conservationists should make every effort to locate these individuals and document these efforts in the civil rights file.

Action Register for _____ Field Office

Action No.	Short Narrative	Action Date	Certification By	Initials
1	Continue to update conservation needs assessments.	Sept. 30, 2003	ASTC(FO)	
2	Develop resource inventories for tribes.	Sept. 30, 2003	ASTC(FO)	
3	Review priority conservation needs with partners.	Sept. 30, 2003	ASTC(FO)	
4	Training on the development of joint plans of operations.	June 30, 2003	ASTC(FO)	
5	Develop training action plan.	May 31, 2003	ASTC(FO)	
6	Concurrence by SLT in the training action plan.	June 30, 2003	ASTC(FO)	
7	Update ICAMS with required skills information.	June 30, 2003	ASTC(FO) & SLT	
8	Training session on the requirements for weekly schedules.	May 31, 2003	ASTC(FO)	
9	Develop long term tracking schedule to ensure client's needs are being met.	May 31, 2003	ASTC(FO)	
10	Guidance on capturing time spent on school land.	March 31, 2003	SLT	
11	Ensure all certified practices are captured on OK-MGT-WKSHT-1.	June 30, 2003	ASTC(FO)	
12	Revise practice review policy	March 31, 2003	SCE	
13	Review supporting documentation requirements in GM 450, Part 407, Subpart B	Immediately	DC's	
14	Training on designing watering facilities.	September 30, 2003	TSO Spec. ECS/ENG Staffs	
15	Provide guidance on preparing CPA-4 for structural practices.	July 31, 2003	RE & RS	
16	Ensure CPA-4 is properly prepared for structural practices.	Immediately	DC's	
17	Provide guidance on nutrient management requirements.	April 30, 2003	SRC	

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18	Provide guidance on non-tech soil descriptions	April 30, 2003	SSS & SRC	
19	Training on non-tech soil descriptions	Sept. 30, 2003	RSS	
20	Provide guidance to field on channel work for watersheds.	March 31, 2003	ASTC(ER)	
21	Review policy on using EWP on federal lands.	March 31, 2003	SCE	
22	Develop simplified environmental effects form.	June 30, 2003	SRC & SSS	
23	Training on completing environmental effects documentation.	Sept. 30, 2003	RSS & RS	
24	Ensure all performance plans are completed in ICAMS.	April 1, 2003	ASTC (FO)	
25	Ensure all position descriptions are correct.	June 30, 2003	ASTC (FO)	
26	Ensure all time code charges are correct.	Immediately	ASTC (FO)	
27	Ensure all vehicles contain required items.	Immediately	ASTC (FO)	
28	Develop documentation on mailouts, etc. for locally-led meetings.	June 30, 2003	ASTC (FO)	
29	Provide contract administration training and DC's make corrections.	Sept. 30, 2003	ASTC (P)	
30	Review applications and begin scheduling to meet workload demands.	Immediately	ASTC (FO)	
31	Conservation planning skills analysis training within all field offices within the zone.	June 30, 2003	ASTC(FO)	
32	Complete actions from civil rights reviews.	April 30, 2003	ASTC (FO)	
33	Correct handicap issues.	May 31, 2003	ASTC (FO)	